



## 2. Liturgical Colours – why do we sometimes have different coloured cloths on the altar?

At St Mary's we currently celebrate Communion at three tables, or altars. The main one of these, at the east end, is the High Altar, which is used for the Eucharist on Sundays. This has a plain white altar cloth (a 'Laudian pall', named after Archbishop Laud, Charles I's Archbishop of Canterbury) over which a coloured strip of material, a fall, is laid varying according to the liturgical season.

The liturgical seasons, and their colours, are: -

Advent	Advent Sunday to Christmas Eve	Purple
Christmas	Christmas till Epiphany	Gold
Epiphany	Epiphany to Candlemas	Gold
Candlemas to Ash Wednesday		Green
Lent	Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday	Purple
Palm Sunday		Red
Maundy Thursday		Gold
Maundy Thursday to Holy Saturday		altars stripped, hangings removed
Easter	Easter Sunday to Pentecost	Gold
Pentecost		Red
Weekdays after Pentecost		Green
Trinity Sunday		Gold
Ordinary Time	Trinity Sunday to All Saints Day	Green
All Saints Day		Gold
Sundays before Advent		Red or Green
Christ the King (Last Sunday before Advent)		Red

Red is also used on days when we commemorate martyrs.

Blue may be used as an alternative to purple in Advent. White may sometimes be used as an alternative to gold or red. Some churches also use blue or pink ('rose') on festivals associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

At St Mary's, we have altar falls in purple, gold, red and green. Priestly vestments have been or are being made to match all of these. The thinking behind this is that when carrying out the consecration at the Eucharist the priest symbolically takes on the identity of the central figure at the altar.

The symbolism of the colours is:

- ◆ Purple signifies the solemn seasons of Advent and Lent
- ◆ Gold is the colour of majesty, glory and festivity
- ◆ Red stands both for blood (Christ's blood, shed for us, martyrs, Remembrance-tide) and for fire (Pentecost)
- ◆ Green is the colour of 'Ordinary Time', when there is no special commemoration in the Church's year

In the days before congregations could read or, usually, understand the words of the service, the changing colours were a means of reminding them what was taking place. They remain as a focus of brightness, variety, and, it is hoped, beauty in the church.

Our weekday celebrations usually take place in the Lady Chapel, which is on the left as you come in. The hanging on this is gold, with moons, stars and roses; all symbols associated with St Mary the Mother of Jesus.

Once a month a weekday celebration takes place at our third altar, formerly called the Requiem Altar and hung with purple and black. More recently, it has been renamed the Resurrection Altar, and has a frontal with a design representing an empty tomb.

All three can be and are used for the administration of Holy Communion at the parish Eucharist on Sundays.